```
VZCZCXYZ0004
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNR #2518/01 1591143
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081143Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2305
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6958
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 1692
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 4939
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3958
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS NAIROBI 002518

SIPDIS

AIDAC AFDROUGHT

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E, EPRATT
USAID/W FOR AA/DCHA, WGARVELINK, LROGERS
DCHA/OFDA FOR GGOTTLIEB, AFERRARA, ACONVERY, PMORRIS,
CGOTTSCHALK, CPRATT
DCHA/FFP FOR JDWORKEN
AFR/EA FOR JBORNS, JESCALONA
USUN FOR EMALY
BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER
ROME FOR FODAG
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NSC FOR TSHORTLEY
```

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: EAID PREF SOCI UN XA

SUBJECT: UN WORKSHOP ON INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN
AFRICA

Summary

¶1. On May 29, the UN Office for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) convened a three-day
humanitarian information network workshop in Nairobi
focused on Africa-specific concerns. This year's
workshop is a continuation of a process begun in 2002.
The primary purpose of the Nairobi workshop was to
provide participants with a better understanding of
managing information in challenging humanitarian
environments. Particular focus was given to
discussions on strengthening humanitarian information
management capacities in Africa, especially with regard
to assessing humanitarian crises, identifying gaps,
monitoring, evaluation, and early warning, as well as
to taking stock of current best practices. End
summary.

¶2. From May 29 to 31, a Washington-based USAID/OFDA
Information Officer and Nairobi-based USAID/OFDA
Information Technology Specialist attended OCHA's
Humanitarian Information Network workshop. This year's
workshop was a continuation efforts by OCHA to improve
humanitarian information management that began in
February 2002 with the Geneva Symposium of Best
Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange, and
continued with follow-up workshops in Bangkok in
December 2003 and Panama in August 2005.

Broad-based Participation

¶3. Participants in the 2006 Nairobi workshop were
drawn from key humanitarian organizations, including UN
agencies, local and international non-governmental
organizations (NGOs), national governments, regional
organizations, donors, and other stakeholders.
Participants primarily consisted of practitioners

working in information management, information communications technology, and general information functions, but also included senior management from participating organizations.

Purpose

¶4. The workshop's purpose was to strengthen humanitarian information management and exchange in Africa. Information management was defined as the sum of all activities, including collection, processing, organization, and dissemination of information that assist humanitarian actors to achieve their goals in an effective and timely manner. The workshop focused on Africa-specific humanitarian concerns to enable participants to better understand the management of information within a context of multiple humanitarian challenges. Additionally, it provided support for the development of information management practices across Africa, and raised new issues in managing information, in particular the new UN-based cluster approach.

¶5. The workshop's objectives were to:

-- Assess how information management can support delivery of humanitarian assistance;

-- Promote and develop information management standards to enable professional and effective information exchange at the interagency level of support;

-- Create linkages between information management, advocacy, and early warning;

-- Create links between local and regional needs for information management standards, tools, and best

practices in the context of specific humanitarian situations; and

-- Develop and sustain regional standards and best practices among humanitarian information partners in Africa.

Panel Discussions

¶6. Workshop panels were held on the following topics:

-- Managing information in difficult humanitarian environments. Using the context of the Darfur emergency, this panel addressed the challenges of managing information in an environment of multiple humanitarian challenges such as movements of internally displaced persons, vast coverage area, and coordination among a large number of agencies. Important points raised included recognizing information management as a collaborative process between the field and headquarters, knowing the target audience and user needs, distinguishing between what humanitarian actors need to know and what's nice to know, keeping the system simple, ensuring rapid turnaround of information products, and encouraging ownership among users of information systems.

-- Supporting humanitarian partners to take informed decisions in the determination of priorities and the mobilization of resources. This panel covered the role of information in accurately assessing needs, monitoring delivery assistance, and tracking who is doing what and where and identifying and addressing gaps to determine priorities for action. Discussions focused on the use of the UN?s new cluster approach for activity analysis, which was a new concept for most participants.

-- Managing information to support advocacy and public information in raising awareness and mobilizing response. Discussion centered on the fine line that

information specialists encounter between provision of information and advocacy efforts, especially within the sensitive and highly political arena of human security. The main issue raised was the risk of misinterpretation by information management staff of what constitutes advocacy.

-- Early warning, preparedness, and response. Participants discussed personal and agency experiences on current early warning systems in Africa, lessons learned, and whether the systems provide timely communication of early warning signals to all actors, early preparedness, and early action, and whether these tools are shared among actors on the ground. An important observation was the overwhelming number of early warning systems in use in Africa, and the lack of common terminology, standards, and classifications providing consistent and reliable information to humanitarian actors to allow for accurate situational analysis.

Observations/Conclusions

¶7. With the growing complexity of humanitarian emergencies, effective information management has become a critical component of relief operations. The 2002 Geneva Symposium discussed pertinent concepts such as data standards, collection methods, processing, analysis, organization, quality, and dissemination of information for assessments and baseline data. These issues, identified in 2002 as critical to supporting humanitarian operations, were addressed again during

the 2006 workshop. Discussion groups consistently cited similar themes of accessibility, inclusiveness, inter-operability, accountability, verifiability, relevance, objectivity, humanity, timeliness, and sustainability of the data that information management practitioners provide to humanitarian actors.

¶8. While the workshop raised key issues, several important concerns were not adequately addressed:

-- Presently, no agency, person, or group has been mandated to take the lead in overseeing implementation of the action points raised. Although previous workshops led to important conclusions and lessons, there was no lead agency to oversee implementation of the various recommendations made. Similarly, it is not clear what the outcome of the 2006 Nairobi workshop will be and whether participating agencies will produce a workable framework with appropriate follow on activities.

-- Humanitarian actors need to identify user needs and emphasize data sets and formats that directly support decision-making at the field level and promote data and information standards within the humanitarian community by expanding on partnerships.

-- There is a clear need to engage local and national actors, civil society, and private sector groups in information management activities. National participation in emergency planning, monitoring, and evaluation should also be encouraged. This could be strengthened by building and strengthening national capacity in information management and exchange and embracing the use of local knowledge.

BELLAMY